

# How Wartime Bermuda Aids Defense of Empire

ARTICLE NO. 18  
(By Hugh Tompkins)

The position of Bermuda makes it extremely important. It is the only group of islands in all that part of the western Atlantic, about 600 miles from Florida, about 670 from New York and 720 from Halifax. The outer West Indies are about the same distance away. It is as though Bermuda is the centre of a semi-circle of coast line, from Porto Rico to Nova Scotia.

If that group of islands belonged to Germany or any other of the Axis Powers, it would make a most difficult situation for all the Atlantic coastline of North America. The old seafarers who picked up all these odd bits of land for the British Empire did us a great service.

Bermuda used to be a favorite hang-out for pirates, and I suspect that some of the smaller islands may be named after pirates, though that may be incorrect. But names like "Morgan's Island" raise suspicion, and "Silbert Island" leaves something to the imagination. It is fortunate that it isn't in the hands of the pirates of today.

A year or more ago, while the United States was still uneasily neutral, Britain made a deal, exchanging some 50 old destroyers for a chain of naval bases on British territory. Bermuda is one of the most important. There is already a great British naval base there, and probably has been one for years. The Darrell's Island base, where the Clipper lands, is really an Imperial Airways base. When I was in Bermuda, before the United States had come officially into the war, there seemed to be few, if any, British naval units at Bermuda, but there were plenty of American naval vessels, already at work, apparently, conveying shipping.

**Close-Up of an Aircraft Carrier**  
The most interesting of these ships was an aircraft carrier of the largest type. These are probably the most valuable ships in the world to-day in all navies. Japan has counted heavily on them for many of her successes. Some of the British aircraft carriers, notable the Illustrious and the Ark Royal, the latter now sunk, became particularly famous. It will be aircraft carriers which will bulk largely in attacks on Japan and the re-taking of the Pacific Islands. One of the most important features of the recent battle west of Midway Island in the Pacific, was that Japan lost two of three of these ships.

When I was in Bermuda in September, I saw one American aircraft carrier at a distance. Returning at the end of October by boat, the Excambion passed close beside one of these ships, while arriving and departing.

Pictures of aircraft carriers are familiar to most readers. The ship has a broad, flat deck from which planes go and to which they return. Many planes were huddled close together on one end of the flight deck, some of them with one wing folded up in the air, to save storage space. The deck below was open at the sides and many more planes could be seen stored there. These planes are raised to the flight deck by elevators.

**Through a Mined Harbor**  
Bermuda hasn't been attacked yet by plane or ship and I cannot say anything about the defences, but it is no secret that the entrance to the Great Sound is mined.

The Excambion was met off the eastern tip of the islands by a little pilot boat. The pilot proved to be a negro. The boat was a bit late and it was getting nearly dark. There was some doubt whether it would be possible to dock in Hamilton that night.

Taking a ship through a mine field must be one of the world's most exciting occupations. One ship and the lives of several hundred persons are endangered. We stood with a group of young Europeans on the upper deck and watched the progress.

It was quite dark before the boat got in among the mines. It moved at a snail's pace. Apparently, there is no straight course through the defences, but it winds here and there. It is said that enemy submarines can get into a harbor by following a surface ship that is being piloted in Bermuda, unless the sub attached itself to the rudder of the ship and then it would never get out again.

It was a dirty night in late October. Six weeks before, Bermuda had been so parched that spring water from Maine was being sold for one dollar a bottle. Now the rainy season had arrived and rain fell continuously and heavily.

There were insignificant sticks to mark the passage through the mine-field. The Excambion would pick up one of them with her searchlights and steer directly towards it, then stop until the next stick was found, and turning in that direction, move ahead again. It was a slow process but at last it passed between the two rocks that mark the entrance to Hamilton harbor, and tied up at the wharf where, six weeks earlier, I had seen one of the Canadian National line of "Lady" boats, painted in battleship grey, but with the brass letters of

the name still showing through the paint. I believe that lovely ship has since been sunk by an enemy torpedo.

**The Centre of Censorship**  
There is one feature of Bermuda in wartime of which little is said, but it is decidedly important. It is the king-pin of the British censorship service. All air mail letters passed through Bermuda and all were read by the censors there. Many of the letters that went by boat were also taken through Bermuda as they could be censored there. The Excambion unloaded bags of mail for hours, obviously just to be read and sent on—or destroyed.

Possibly you recall that early in the war, our war, that is, before the United States expected to get into it, there were some complaints because the mail bags were taken away from the Clippers and letters held until read. Last Fall, any friction passed. In October, it wasn't only the letters which came under the scrutiny of the censors, but all the passengers on the Excambion as well.

Most of the censors are girls. They occupy the two largest hotels in Hamilton, the Bermudians and the Princess. Obviously there are hundreds of them, one estimate being 800. They have added one more problem. In former times, those two hotels were open only part of the year and they stored up large quantities of drinking water. Now they are used the year around and water is just that much more scarce.

Some of the censors are men, but most are women. They are chosen for what they know, particularly for the languages they speak and write, but also for their knowledge of foreign countries and enemy cities. A number, as I saw personally, write several languages in shorthand, and that is quite an accomplishment.

Shortly before I was in Bermuda, Life magazine sent a photographer to Bermuda and he was able to get past the secrecy that surrounds the work of the censors and take pictures of them. He had some most attractive young ladies in bathing suits, standing on diving boards, and pictures of that type.

The ones I saw were mostly between 30 and 40, not particularly beautiful, but certainly intelligent. Most of them are university graduates. Many are from rich families, especially those who have travelled. Their work is hard and most important and most of them probably grew tired of Bermuda long ago.

Their work requires speed and intelligence. It is claimed that letters taken from one Clipper are ready for the next one, two days later. There may be several hundred thousand letters in a single mail. Those who are trying to get secrets through will use all kinds of ingenuity and the censors must be too smart for them.

Of the letters that I sent back by air mail while in England, two bits were cut out. I should have known better than to mention either, as they were about locations of aircraft factories and places of importance.

Coming back to New York on the refugee ship, Excambion, I had a chance to watch another job done by the censors, co-operating with the Royal Navy. After that, the efficiency of the secret service went away in my estimation.

The Canadian editors had many privileges. I was advised to wait until I returned to Canada before doing any writing, so there would be no censoring of what I wrote, but I had notes and photographs and many other things which would normally raise doubts in the mind of a conscientious censor. We were all warned that when we got to Bermuda, beyond the reach of the British Council, censorship would be strict. To overcome that difficulty, we submitted our stuff to a censor in London, who gathered it all into a bag and sealed it up with sealing wax and official seals and red tape. That was a hint to Bermuda to pass it all unopened.

As it turned out, that was unnecessary. Those people at Bermuda not only had the names of everyone on board, but they knew something about everyone. The Canadians they dismissed with a wave of the hand. We could go on shore for the night if we wished; it was raining and we all found it more interesting to stay on board and watch proceedings.

The European passengers were taken to tables apart and questioned at length. The questioners knew the various languages and the countries and their landmarks. Everything was taken down in shorthand.

An immense amount of valuable information must be gained in that way. They checked up on results of bombing, on civilian morale, on the reasons for going to the United States. They knew many of the answers beforehand. No doubt, some valuable tips were passed on to the American authorities, as well as to the British Government.

Germany has no Bermuda. Our enemies don't control the sea routes except those in the Western Pacific. They must check up on people who are travelling from one part of the Empire to another or between the Allied Nations. It must be something of a handicap.

## The Week at OTTAWA

Specially Written for The Acton Free Press by  
BY JACK WILLIAMS  
Canadian Press Staff Writer

Shipping problems of the Allied nations had sharp repercussions in Canadian homes this week with the introduction of severe coupon rationing of tea and coffee.

Replacing the honor system which called for a voluntary reduction of one-half in consumption of tea and one-quarter in the consumption of coffee, the Wartime Prices and Trade Board announced an immediate coupon rationing system allowing each person one ounce of tea or four ounces of coffee a week.

At a conference in Ottawa, Labor Minister Mitchell and Robert M. Little, director of national selective services, discussed with newspaper publishers the growing seriousness of Canada's manpower supply.

Tightened control over new employment, dismissals and resignations is anticipated within a few weeks as part of a widespread persuasive policy to channel more men and women into essential war industries. Although the plan is basically voluntary it provides teeth for enforcement by the national selective service organization, it was reported.

Now that Parliament has adjourned until next January—subject to recall in the interim if an emergency makes such action necessary—one matter likely to receive early cabinet consideration is a proposal by the prairie provinces for emergency debt legislation to replace provincial legislation recently declared ultra vires.

The proposal has been submitted to Justice Minister St. Laurent but consideration by the government has been delayed by Finance Minister Flavel engaged in guiding budget legislation through the Commons.

### Communist Party

Justice Minister St. Laurent is likely to give early attention to the perplexing problem of the Communist Party of Canada and whether the existing ban on the organization should be lifted.

The problem was tossed into the lap of parliament when a Commons Committee recommended removal of the ban on the party and six other organizations considered illegal. But parliament avoided debate on the contentious topic although C.C.F. members of Commons asked Mr. St. Laurent what would be done about it.

The Justice Minister told the House the government would give most careful consideration to the report but he personally opposed any action which could be interpreted as a "blessing" by the House of Commons on the Communist party which is still illegal in the United States.

### As to Conscription

As the third session of Canada's 19th parliament neared an end conscription for overseas service remained the most important subject to receive consideration in one of the long, rest parliamentary sessions on record. The amendment to the National Resources Mobilization Act, opening the way for overseas conscription, passed the Senate by a 42-9 vote after a three-day debate.

Prime Minister Mackenzie King has given assurance that overseas conscription will not be introduced until a vote of confidence has been taken. Mr. Isley during the week tabled supplementary estimates of \$28,159,700 bringing the total estimates for the year of \$483,044,065. Largest item in the supplementary estimates was \$22,950,000 for wheat acreage reduction payments and administration.

### Housing Assistance

The supplementary estimates made provision for national housing loans to encourage construction of small permanent homes in congested localities and the conversion of large residences to apartment houses.

Munitions Minister Howe also announced that Wartime Housing Ltd., government company which has undertaken large housing projects in areas congested because of the construction of new war industries, will provide assistance for other crowded municipalities.

Finance Minister Isley's record-breaking budget was made effective through amendments to the Income Tax Act, Excess Profits Tax Act and Succession Duties Tax Act. The amendments bring these acts in line with the proposals outlined by Mr. Isley when he presented his budget June 23.

The House spent two days debating the report of Chief Justice Sir Lyman Duff on the Canadian expedition to Hong Kong. The debate was based on a motion by Howard Green (Con Vancouver South) calling for reorganization of the defence department in effect a motion of censure. The motion was defeated 130-31.

### ROOSTER MASCOT

CAIRO, (AP) A rooster found in the wreckage of a British supply dump near Avroma has been adopted as a mascot by a South African medical dressing station. The bird has been nicknamed "I.P." after Maj. Gen. I. P. de Villiers, a South African commander.

## Enters Service Of Adopted Land

EDMONTON, (CP) — In the first Great War, her husband was a major-general and she was a lieutenant, and this war finds her again in uniform, this time with her two sons. She fought side by side with her husband in the Austro-Ukrainian army in the 1918-1920 campaign against Russia.

She is Mrs. Shakevich, grey-haired, is a member of the Alberta Women's Service Corps and this month is going on active service with the Canadian Women's Army Corps. She was a lieutenant in the Austrian army, and is an expert horsewoman.

Her eldest son, John, is a Royal Canadian Air Force instructor in the Royal Canadian Air Force in eastern Canada.

A younger son, Edward, is a member of the Edmonton-Air Cadets, and is waiting for the day when his age will permit him to join the R.C.A.F.

### EX-M.P. KILLED IN FALL

HORNBURY, England, (CP) — Col. Emil William Pickering, member of Parliament for Dewsbury from 1918-22, was killed when he fell from his horse.

## THE RAILWAY AND THE WAR . . . By Thurston Topham

The war has created a tremendous demand for written record, communication. The Canadian telegraph companies, by increasing their facilities, have kept pace with this vital phase of Canada's war effort.

The Canadian National Telegraph and Wireless Union have established a wartime communication system by means of which communication headquarters can keep in constant touch with ferry pilots.

The increase in message mileage of the Canadian National Telegraph since the start of the war would circle the globe 3 1/2 times.

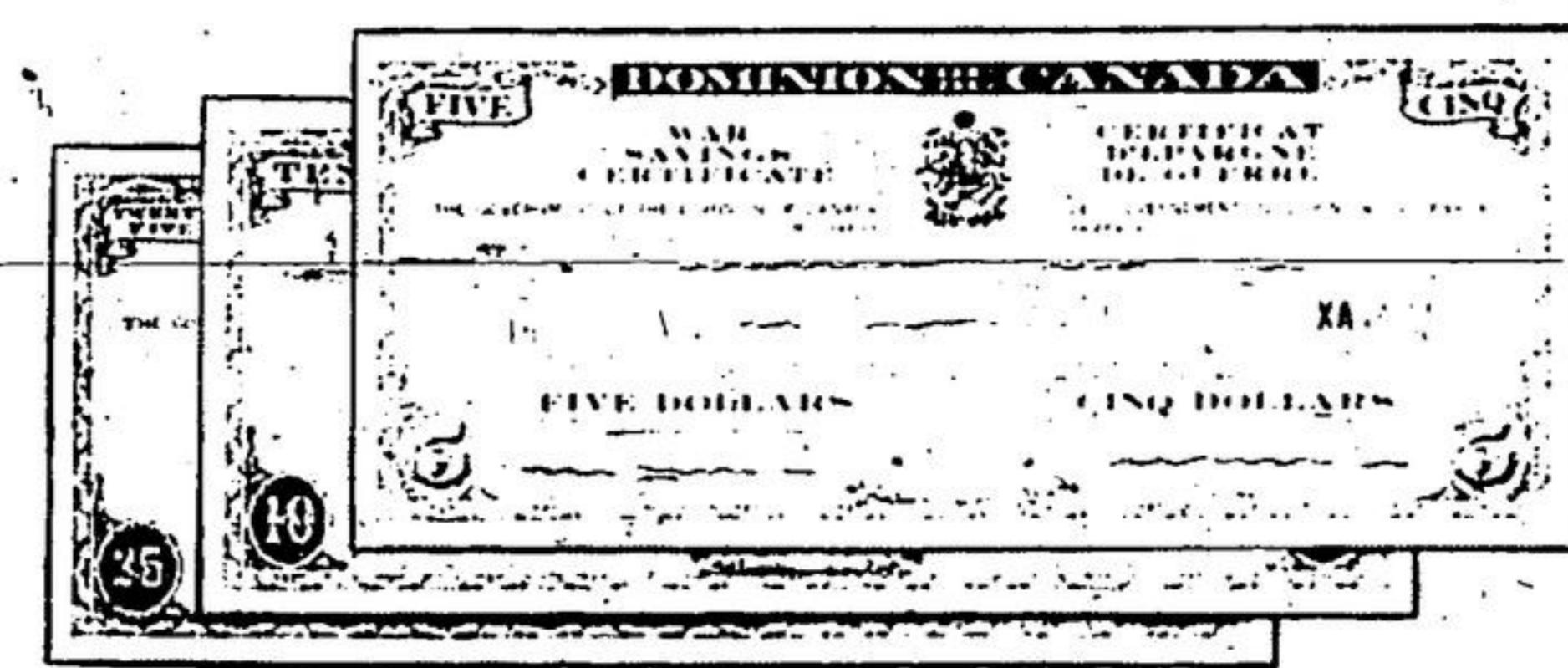
C.N. Telegraphs are operating offices in military establishments throughout Canada for the expeditious handling of war messages.

The magic of joined wireless, the carrier system introduced by the Canadian National Telegraphs in 1927, enables the simultaneous exchange of 96 messages through radio frequency channels guided by one pair of wires.

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